



THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

Weather Awareness: The Key to Safety

By Aaron Gilstad

Believe it or not, spring is in the air and the last remnants of winter will soon disappear. Although the winter has not been nearly as long or cold as we North Dakotans have grown accustomed, it will be nice to have the warm weather and no worries about unexpected blizzards stranding us away from home. However, with the warmer weather comes the threat of severe thunderstorms in all their glory.

Severe thunderstorms on the prairie can be one of the most beautiful sights to behold as well one of the most dangerous. Offering a stunning array of sights and sounds, they also offer a multitude of dangers when not respected or caught unaware. Tornadoes and large hail are often considered the most dangerous, but people tend to overlook other dangerous weather events such as flash floods caused by heavy rain, damaging straight-line winds, and lightning until it is too late. Nationally, in fact, flash floods and lightning cause more deaths annually than tornadoes do, though they usually get less attention.

In an effort to re-introduce the public to the hazards associated with severe weather, North Dakota Governor John Hoeven has designated the week of April 29 – May 3 as Severe Summer Weather Awareness Week. By reminding the public about severe weather before we normally expect it, we hope to raise the awareness of the possible dangers of such conditions to keep you safe through the summer.

Part of the primary mission of the NDCMP is to mitigate crop hail losses in the project area, but much is also done to support local emergency warning systems and the National Weather Service warning system. With two permanent radars located



in Stanley and Bowman, and a total of five field meteorologists and 16 pilots dispersed throughout the area, the NDCMP has become a valuable asset to local emergency services for western ND during the summer months. NDCMP personnel, through visual observation and/or observation equipment, such as radar, will report weather related information ranging from tornado sighting and observation to lightning related fire spotting to the radar personnel. The radar personnel will then forward the information on to the proper authorities whether that is the local police and fire department or the NWS. The radar images, providing snapshots of area storm activity every five minutes, are also available to the public over the internet at www.swc.state.nd.us/arb/ndcmp and are often helpful to those downwind of approaching thunderstorms.

The often rapid development of severe weather can easily catch people unaware, but one can easily be prepared if such a situation arises. A person can protect him/herself by knowing how to react to dangerous weather situations and by knowing

where to get additional weather information. The NOAA weather radio can be a valuable tool for receiving current weather forecasts and conditions as well as immediate access to severe weather warnings. These relatively inexpensive systems can most likely be purchased in your local electronics store. Additional information of interest may be found on the internet via several web sites. Look to www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov

for lightning safety and general information on lightning strikes, www.crh.noaa.gov/bis/summer.htm for additional tornado safety information, and www.crh.noaa.gov/radar for additional radar images.

Through general severe weather knowledge, attention to weather forecasts and conditions, and recognition of dangerous weather you will be prepared for anything Mother Nature has to throw at you. Have a safe and enjoyable summer. ■

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